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Revealed: publisher owned by the Catholic Church sells pornography

Germany's bishops promise to stop the company's distribution of erotic novels

Tony Paterson | Saturday 5 November 2011 01:00 | [79 shares](#) |

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Germany's biggest Catholic-owned publishing house has been rocked by disclosures that it has been selling thousands of pornographic novels with titles such as *Sluts Boarding School* and *Lawyer's Whore* with the full assent of the country's leading bishops.

The revelations made in the publishing-industry newsletter *Buchreport* concern *Weltbild*, a company with an annual €1.7bn (£1.5bn) turnover and 6,400 employees. It is Germany's largest bookseller after Amazon and wholly owned by the Catholic Church.

Buchreport revealed that *Weltbild*'s massive assortment of titles available to customers online includes some 2,500 "erotic" books with unmistakably lewd titles including *Call Me Slut!*, *Take Me Here*, *Take Me Now!* and *Lawyer's Whore*, to name a few. The publisher's website also pictures the titles' lascivious dust jackets that feature colour photographs of scantily clad women in high heels and erotic underwear.

Yesterday, Carel Haff, *Weltbild*'s managing director, was quoted as saying that the revelations had provoked "a very intense and critical dialogue" within the company. He said discussions were under way about possibly limiting the assortment of titles that would be available in future.

But Bernhard Müller, editor of the Catholic magazine PUR, dismissed the clerics' reaction as grossly hypocritical. He alleged that the pornography scandal at Weltbild had been going on for at least a decade with the Church's full knowledge. Mr Müller said that in 2008, a group of concerned Catholics had sent bishops a 70-page document containing irrefutable evidence that Weltbild published books that promoted pornography, Satanism and magic. They demanded that the publisher withdraw the titles.

But their protests appear to have been completely ignored. Writing in the Die Welt newspaper, Mr Müller said most of the bishops refused to respond to the charges. "The sudden proclaimed astonishment of many church leaders that pornographic material is being distributed by their publishing house, is play acting – bad play acting," Mr Müller said. "Believers have been complaining to their bishops about this for years."

The Catholic Church bought Weltbild more than 30 years ago. The publisher has gradually transformed itself into one of Germany's largest media companies with the help of some €182m of Catholic Church tax levied on believers. To increase its profits, in 1998 the company merged with five other publishing houses that market pornographic titles. One of them is Droemer Knaur, which is 50 per cent church-owned. Another is Blue Panther Books, which was excluded from the list of participating publishers at this year's Frankfurt Book Fair allegedly because of the pornographic content of its titles.

It emerged yesterday that in an attempt to clear itself of potential embarrassment over the sale of porn, the Catholic Church tried to sell Weltbild in 2009. But the bishops apparently abandoned the idea after they failed to get the price they were asking.

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